

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**STUDENTS GET A FOOT IN THE DOOR THIS SCHOOL YEAR
WITH IMMUNIZATIONS**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Even before they enter the classroom this year, students in Virginia will be a step ahead of poor health and disease. Thanks to the vaccinations required for entry into Virginia schools, students are protected against diseases like pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria, among other serious diseases.

“Starting this year 6th grade students are required to have their Tdap vaccine, which protects against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis, before classes begin,” explains Jim Farrell, director of the Division of Immunization at the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). This is a change from last year when parents had a 90 day grace period after the start of classes to have their children vaccinated. “We encourage parents to get their children’s vaccinations as soon as they can,” says Farrell. “This is a busy time for clinics and doctors offices and parents may find it difficult to schedule an appointment if they wait until the last minute.” “That,” Farrell warns, “could mean students are not able to start school with their classmates.”

In addition to the Tdap vaccine required of all rising 6th graders, children entering school, daycare and college are required to show proof of certain vaccinations. For a complete list of school required vaccinations contact your local health department or go to <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/Immunization/requirements.htm>. Vaccinations are offered at local health departments. Parents may also take their children to their primary care provider.

Making sure children are vaccinated against disease is just one way parents can help get their kids off to a good start this school year. Here are ways parents can set a good example, promote good health for their children and improve their likelihood for success in school:

- **Practice Preventive Health** – Schedule regular check-ups with your doctor and dentist. Keep immunizations up to date and make sure that children with diabetes get a flu shot every year.

(more)

Prevent the spread of germs and viruses by teaching children to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, to wash their hands thoroughly and often, and to avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Keep them home when they are sick. More helpful tips are available at www.vdh.virginia.gov/pandemicflu.

- **Work with Your School** – Share important medical information with the school nurse and develop a health care plan for children who take medicine regularly or have a chronic health condition. Ensure that the school has a plan to deal with natural or man-made emergencies. Visit www.injuryfreeschoolsva.org for resources on injury prevention in schools.
- **Teach Internet Safety** – Teach your children to never give out identifying information, such as their name, address, phone number or school name. They should never respond to messages that are suggestive or belligerent or make them feel uncomfortable. Know the online services your child uses and whether you can block objectionable material. Find other online safety guides for parents and children at www.i-safe.com.
- **Eat Healthy Foods** – Good nutrition equals good grades. Start every day with a good breakfast. Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, drink plenty of water and avoid foods and drinks that are high in sugar. Keep healthy snacks on hand. Visit www.mypyramid.org, an excellent resource for nutrition information. Work with the school to provide healthy menus in the cafeteria and healthy snacks in vending machines.
- **Be Active Every Day** – Being physically fit helps kids look, feel and do their best. Help them plan to sit less and move more. Urge children and adolescents to be physically active 60 minutes every day. One way is to limit TV and computer time to two hours a day. After tenth grade, girls are twice as likely as boys to be inactive. Visit www.girlshealth.gov/ for information on how to put the Go in Go-Girl-Go.
- **Prevent Tooth Decay** – Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease among Virginia children and may affect self-esteem and schoolwork. Kids should have regular dental check ups and brush at least twice a day, before school and bedtime, with fluoride toothpaste. Limit sugary snacks and drinks, and provide healthy snacks that include fresh fruit and crunchy vegetables. Ask your dentist about dental sealants to protect the chewing surfaces of back teeth from decay.
- **Provide a Safe Environment** – Bike helmets reduce the risk of brain injury by 90 percent. Virginia's new Child Safety Seat Law requires the use of child restraint devices for children until their eighth birthday. Lock guns away and store ammunition in a separate place. Supervise children on playgrounds and around water. Visit www.vahealth.org/civp for injury prevention information. Don't allow smoking in your car or home. According to the U. S. Surgeon General, there's no safe amount of second hand smoke.
- **Protect Emotional Health** – On average, two Virginia youths die each week from suicide. Warning signs include feelings of hopelessness, rage, withdrawal from friends and dramatic mood changes. For more on signs and ways to help see "About Suicide" at www.suicidology.org. For warning signs of teen depression visit www.safeyouth.org.
- **Prevent Bullying and Dating Violence** – No one deserves to be abused. Teach your child the proper time and way to ask for help with bullies. Tell children not to cheer on or even watch a conflict with a bully. For more tips visit www.vahealth.org/civp/topics/bullying.asp. Teach your teens the basic rules for healthy dating and encourage them to talk to you about their relationships. More tips are available at www.vahealth.org/civp/topics/teendatingviolence.asp.

For more information about keeping your family safe and healthy throughout the year, visit the VDH Web site at www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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